Assessment Practices in Legal English classroom: A study from Multiple Intelligences Perspective

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ABSTRACT: Assessment in Legal English classrooms is essential for evaluating learners' language proficiency and professional communication skills, yet traditional assessment methods often emphasize written tests and overlook learners' diverse abilities. Based on Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI), this study examines assessment practices in Legal English classrooms to identify more inclusive and effective approaches. Employing a qualitative and descriptive research design, the study analyzes assessment methods such as tests, essays, presentations, debates, portfolios, and performance-based tasks in relation to different intelligences. The findings suggest that MI-based assessment enhances student engagement, accommodates individual differences, and provides a more comprehensive evaluation of legal language competence. The study concludes that integrating Multiple Intelligences Theory into assessment practices contributes to more authentic, learner-centered, and professionally relevant assessment in Legal English education.

INTRODUCTION

Assessment is a central component of Legal English instruction, as it measures learners' language competence while shaping teaching practices and learning outcomes. Traditional assessment in Legal English classrooms often relies on written tests, which primarily assess linguistic accuracy and may overlook learners' individual differences and diverse cognitive strengths. The Theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI), proposed by Gardner (1983, 2011), offers an alternative framework by viewing intelligence as a combination of multiple abilities rather than a single, uniform construct. Research in ESL and EFL contexts indicates that MI-based teaching and assessment positively influence learners' competence, motivation, and engagement (Ghamrawi, 2014; Armstrong, 2009). Wallace (2010) further argues that foreign language teaching and assessment practices evolve toward more learner-centered and authentic approaches when MI theory is applied. Despite these findings, limited attention has been given to MI-based assessment in Legal English classrooms, where learners must demonstrate not only language proficiency but also legal reasoning and professional communication skills. Therefore, this study examines assessment practices in Legal English teaching from the perspective of Multiple Intelligences Theory, aiming to promote more inclusive and effective assessment methods.

3. The Multiple Intelligences Theory (MIT) in Education

The application of multiple intelligences in teaching has become widespread in many academic disciplines and learning environments at different levels, and its impact on education is undeniable. This theory can also be used in early childhood education, university, vocational, and adult education initiatives (Smith, 2002). Recognizing the diversity of learners' intelligences is crucial in education to unlock their full potential (Kumbar, 2006). The Multiple Intelligences Theory has uncovered many neglected talents or intelligences that lacked opportunities to manifest, a consequence of a single-minded or focused approach. Thanks to the Multiple Intelligences Theory, the diversity of learners is given attention for holistic development. The distinction between intelligence types, intelligent and unintelligent no longer exists as it did before. Instead, everyone is intelligent, intelligent in one field or another.

Multiple Intelligences Theory and Assessment Methods in Teaching English

Changing the way learning outcomes are assessed is also one of the goals of the Multiple Intelligences theory (Armstrong, 2004). While traditional assessments focus on a single skill or intelligence and overlook other important talents, the theory of multiple intelligences proposes an assessment based on the diversity of learners. Lana (2000) argues that traditional assessment methods have many weaknesses, failing to categorize students' abilities because assessment results are based on only one type of skill and focus solely on good or poor results. This fails to detect students who may possess other abilities to solve problems while still achieving the learning objectives.

Stan (2004) proposed a variety of exercises and tests to comprehensively assess learners' abilities. In addition to common assessment tools such as multiple-choice tests, true/false tests, sentence completion tests, essay tests, short-answer tests, oral exams, and aptitude tests, teachers can use essay tests, open-book tests, and learning journals. Teachers can modify all these tests according to MIT principles. Ramos (2007) argues that a learning journal is one of the effective methods used to evaluate students' learning process, effort, and progress in various areas, across different stages. Besides evaluating learning outcomes, a learning journal is a way to discover strengths and weaknesses, track one's efforts, and monitor the learner's choices regarding the teacher's teaching methods.

Curriculums have been redesigned to suit recent educational trends and apply the theory of multiple intelligences. While in traditional classrooms, a single curriculum or teaching content was applied to all learners (Arnold & Fonseca, 2004), Kumbar (2006) found that many teachers applied the theory of multiple intelligences by restructuring the curriculum and providing more classroom activities that allow learners to explore and develop different types of intelligence. Based on the learning outcomes and objectives of the course, teachers will apply and distribute appropriate subjects so that learners are provided with sufficient knowledge and skills. Choosing a curriculum that meets the learning objectives and diverse abilities of learners is one of the necessary steps to effectively apply the theory of multiple intelligences. The types of teaching materials should be diverse, including many activities and rich content, in the form of textbooks, reference books, and research books, including paper materials, materials containing images, and audio.

Research has consistently demonstrated a positive relationship between learners' overall language competence and the application of Multiple Intelligences (MI) strategies in ESL and ESP classrooms, including Legal English contexts (Ghamrawi, 2014). When assessment methods are aligned with MI principles, learners are provided with multiple ways to demonstrate their legal language knowledge, skills, and professional competencies. Rather than relying solely on traditional written examinations, MI-based assessment incorporates tests, essays, presentations, debates, portfolios, projects, and performance-based tasks that reflect the diverse cognitive strengths of learners. Wallace (2010) asserts that foreign language teaching and assessment practices inevitably evolve with the application of Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory, as assessment becomes more learner-centered, flexible, and authentic. In Legal English teaching, this shift is particularly significant because students must demonstrate not only linguistic accuracy but also legal reasoning, argumentation, and professional communication skills.

Gardner (1999) emphasizes that assessment grounded in MI theory should focus on performance in meaningful contexts, allowing learners to apply knowledge in realistic situations. This approach is highly relevant to Legal English, where assessment tasks such as case analysis, mock trials, legal presentations, and portfolio writing provide valid evidence of learners' competence. Armstrong (2009) further notes that MI-based assessment supports formative evaluation, enabling continuous feedback and reflection rather than one-time testing. Studies by Richards and Rodgers (2014) indicate that when assessment tasks correspond to learners' dominant intelligences, both motivation and learning efficiency increase, positively influencing the speed and quality of second language acquisition.

Additionally, McKenzie (2005) argues that MI-oriented assessment promotes equity by offering multiple assessment pathways, reducing bias toward learners who excel only in traditional test formats. Ozdemir, Guneysu, and Tekkaya (2006) also highlight that MI-based assessment enhances higher-order thinking skills, such as analysis, problem-solving, and critical evaluation, core competencies in legal education. In the context of Legal English, integrating Multiple Intelligences Theory into assessment practices leads to more comprehensive, reliable, and profession-oriented evaluation, ensuring that learners' legal language competence is assessed in ways that reflect both cognitive diversity and real-world legal demands.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design to investigate assessment practices in Legal English classrooms based on the Theory of Multiple Intelligences. The research is conducted in Legal English classes at the tertiary level, involving 60 students participating in law-related or English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs. The participants are selected through purposive sampling to ensure that they have direct experience with Legal English teaching and assessment.

Data collection methods include classroom observations, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews. Classroom observations focus on identifying assessment activities and methods that reflect different types of intelligences, such as linguistic, logical–mathematical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, spatial, and bodily–kinesthetic intelligences. Document analysis is conducted on assessment

materials, including tests, assignments, portfolios, presentations, and project guidelines, to examine how MI principles are incorporated into assessment design. Semi-structured interviews with teachers and selected students are used to gather insights into perceptions of MI-based assessment, its effectiveness, and challenges in implementation.

Data are analyzed thematically, with assessment practices categorized according to the intelligences they address. Triangulation of data sources enhances the credibility and validity of the findings. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, are strictly observed throughout the research process

FINDINGS

Assessment Activities in Legal English classroom

Based on Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligences and the addition of some fundamental points by William (2004), each type of intelligence corresponds to the most appropriate assessment methods and techniques, activities specifically designed for the lesson content, and effective forms of testing and evaluation for student outcomes.

Linguistic Intelligence

Linguistic Intelligence is fundamental to the assessment practice of Legal English, as legal education relies heavily on learners' ability to comprehend, interpret, and produce complex and precise language. Applying the Theory of Multiple Intelligences with a focus on Linguistic Intelligence allows assessment to move beyond traditional testing and capture students' communicative competence in authentic legal contexts. Assessment measures such as tests are used to evaluate learners' understanding of legal terminology, grammatical accuracy, and reading comprehension. These tests are often integrated with word games involving legal terms, which increase engagement while reinforcing vocabulary retention and contextual usage. Writing-based assessments play a crucial role in evaluating Linguistic Intelligence. Activities such as essay writing, reflective journaling, portfolio writing, and composing articles for websites allow students to demonstrate their ability to organize ideas logically, apply appropriate legal discourse conventions, and express critical viewpoints in written form. Portfolio writing, in particular, provides a cumulative assessment of students' progress, encouraging reflection on learning content and continuous language development.

Oral assessment is equally important in Legal English, and presentations and debates are effective measures for assessing spoken language proficiency. Through presentations, students explain legal concepts, summarize foreign legal texts, and present research findings using professional legal language. Thematic debates and debate-style activities that require students to present and defend viewpoints on selected legal issues further assess argumentative skills, fluency, and the ability to respond to counterarguments. These activities also promote interaction and the effective use of persuasive language in professional contexts. Requiring students to independently read and understand foreign legal texts and present their findings both orally and in writing strengthens advanced reading comprehension, analytical thinking, and precise expression.

By integrating tests, writing, presentations, debates, and portfolio writing, assessment aligned with Linguistic Intelligence provides a comprehensive and balanced evaluation of learners' Legal English proficiency. Such an approach not only measures language knowledge but also develops essential legal communication skills, supports learner autonomy, and ensures that assessment reflects the real linguistic demands of legal study and professional practice

Logical-Mathematical Intelligence

Logical-Mathematical Intelligence plays a significant role in the assessment practice of Legal English, as it emphasizes learners' abilities to reason logically, analyze complex information, and apply structured thinking to legal problems. In legal studies, students must understand abstract rules, identify patterns, and draw reasoned conclusions, making this intelligence particularly relevant. Assessment measures such as multiple-choice questions are effective for evaluating students' understanding of legal concepts, terminology, and logical relationships within legal texts. Open-ended questions further assess analytical thinking by requiring learners to explain reasoning, interpret legal provisions, and justify conclusions using evidence. Essay writing provides a deeper measure of Logical-Mathematical Intelligence by allowing students to construct coherent arguments, apply general legal theories to concrete situations, and evaluate competing viewpoints systematically.

Debates, presentations, and question-and-answer sessions are also valuable assessment tools, as they require students to organize ideas logically, respond to counterarguments, and defend positions in real time. These oral assessments reflect students' ability to apply legal reasoning in communicative contexts while maintaining clarity and logical consistency. Teaching and assessment activities aligned with Logical–Mathematical Intelligence include exploring correlations between general legal theories and their application in specific cases, which helps students connect abstract principles with real-world practice. Analyzing and comparing legal topics across different countries enhances comparative reasoning and the ability to identify similarities, differences, and underlying legal structures. Identifying and proposing solutions to presented legal problems encourages systematic problem-solving and evaluative thinking.

Encouraging students to ask questions fosters deeper inquiry and critical thinking, while allowing them to choose issues to comment on supports independent judgment and logical evaluation. Brain games used to test vocabulary and lesson-related knowledge add an interactive dimension to assessment while reinforcing conceptual understanding. Finally, recording and organizing knowledge through mind maps enables learners to visualize relationships among legal concepts and demonstrate structured reasoning. Through these varied assessment measures and teaching activities, Logical–Mathematical Intelligence is effectively integrated into Legal English instruction, promoting rigorous analysis, critical thinking, and meaningful assessment of learners' legal language competence.

Bodily–Kinesthetic Intelligence

Bodily–Kinesthetic Intelligence plays an important role in the assessment practice of Legal English by emphasizing learning through movement, action, and physical engagement. This type of intelligence is particularly effective for students who understand concepts best when they actively participate and perform tasks rather than passively receive information. Assessment measures such as debates, presentations, question-and-answer sessions, and quizzes conducted in a theatrical format allow learners to demonstrate their legal knowledge through embodied communication. These assessment forms evaluate not only linguistic accuracy but also students' ability to express legal meanings confidently through gestures, posture, and interactive performance.

Teaching activities aligned with Bodily–Kinesthetic Intelligence encourage students to physically engage with legal language and concepts. Students are required to describe the meaning of legal terms through action simulations or vivid physical explanations, which helps transform abstract vocabulary into concrete understanding. Role-playing and recording activities, such as mock trials, client–lawyer interactions, or courtroom procedures, provide authentic contexts in which students can apply Legal English while simulating real professional situations. Organizing competitions in a theatrical format further motivates students to practice legal reasoning and language use creatively while maintaining accuracy and coherence.

In addition, extracurricular activities and experiential learning opportunities are organized to introduce curriculum-related topics, such as the characteristics and organization of courts in Vietnam and other countries. These activities deepen students' understanding of comparative legal systems and professional practices through direct observation and participation. By integrating movement-based teaching activities with performance-oriented assessment measures, Bodily–Kinesthetic Intelligence is effectively incorporated into Legal English instruction. This approach not only enhances student engagement and motivation but also supports deeper comprehension, practical language use, and meaningful assessment of learners' legal communication skills in realistic and dynamic contexts.

Spatial Intelligence

Spatial Intelligence plays a vital role in the assessment practice of Legal English by focusing on learners' ability to understand, organize, and communicate information through visual representation. In legal studies, many concepts such as legal systems, procedures, and case structures are complex and abstract, making visual thinking an effective means of comprehension. Assessment measures including multiple-choice tests can be designed with visual prompts, diagrams, or charts to evaluate students' understanding of legal terminology and conceptual relationships. Writing tasks, journaling, and portfolio writing further assess students' ability to explain legal knowledge while organizing ideas visually through mind maps, annotated diagrams, or illustrated summaries.

Presentations and public speaking activities allow students to demonstrate their Spatial Intelligence by using visual aids such as slides, infographics, flowcharts, and case diagrams to support oral explanations of legal topics. Project work is particularly suitable for this intelligence, as it enables students to integrate legal knowledge with visual design and technological skills. Teaching activities aligned with Spatial Intelligence require students to present the meaning of legal language and concepts through diagrams and images, helping them grasp abstract ideas more concretely. Students are also required to design charts and diagrams to illustrate the structure, functions, and characteristics of legal systems, which enhances analytical clarity and systematic thinking.

The use of information technology to present lesson content visually encourages students to apply digital tools creatively and professionally. Additionally, summarizing and simulating the processes and details of legal cases, situations, or court hearings through visual representations helps learners understand procedural sequences and role relationships more effectively. Through these assessment measures and activities, Spatial Intelligence is effectively integrated into Legal English instruction, promoting deeper understanding, better retention, and meaningful demonstration of students' legal language competence.

Interpersonal Intelligence

Interpersonal Intelligence plays a crucial role in the assessment practice of Legal English, as it emphasizes learners' ability to communicate effectively, collaborate with others, and engage in meaningful social interaction. In legal contexts, professionals must negotiate, argue, and cooperate with diverse stakeholders, making this intelligence highly relevant. Assessment measures such as debates and question-and-answer sessions allow students to demonstrate their ability to express ideas clearly, respond appropriately to others' viewpoints, and defend arguments in interactive settings. Quizzes conducted in a theatrical format further enhance engagement by

requiring teamwork, spontaneous interaction, and shared problem-solving. Learning projects are also effective assessment tools, as they evaluate students' collaborative skills, responsibility, and ability to contribute constructively to group outcomes.

Teaching activities aligned with Interpersonal Intelligence emphasize communication and cooperation. Group or pair discussions on lesson-related topics encourage students to exchange ideas, clarify understanding, and develop persuasive language skills in a supportive environment. Language games that emphasize interaction help reinforce legal vocabulary and concepts while promoting teamwork and mutual understanding. Role-playing and dramatizing lesson content, such as mock negotiations or courtroom interactions, provide authentic contexts for practicing Legal English and social communication skills.

Participation in talks with experts and teachers exposes students to professional discourse and real-world legal perspectives, enhancing both motivation and communicative competence. In addition, organizing academic communities for professional exchange fosters continuous interaction, peer learning, and the development of professional identity. By integrating these activities with interactive assessment measures, Interpersonal Intelligence is effectively incorporated into Legal English instruction, resulting in dynamic, collaborative, and authentic assessment that reflects the communicative demands of legal education and practice.

Intrapersonal Intelligence

Intrapersonal Intelligence plays an essential role in the assessment practice of Legal English by emphasizing learners' capacity for self-awareness, independent learning, and reflective thinking. This type of intelligence is particularly important in legal education, where students are expected to take responsibility for their learning and develop well-reasoned personal judgments. Assessment measures such as tests, essays, short papers, interviews, presentations, and articles are well suited to evaluating intrapersonal intelligence, as they require students to demonstrate individual understanding, critical reflection, and personal engagement with legal topics. Tests and interviews help assess students' depth of comprehension and self-articulation, while essays, short papers, and articles allow them to express independent viewpoints using appropriate legal language. Presentations further enable students to articulate their personal interpretations and research findings with clarity and confidence.

Teaching activities aligned with Intrapersonal Intelligence focus on autonomy and self-directed learning. Students are required to independently research lesson content in advance, plan their own learning goals, and formulate questions related to the topic, which encourages active engagement and self-regulation. They also independently research legal systems, characteristics, and organizational structures by consulting materials from various sources and countries, fostering comparative thinking and deeper self-reflection. Creating a study journal and learning portfolio is a key activity, as it allows students to document their learning process, reflect on challenges and achievements, and track personal progress over time. In addition, guidance provided to students on writing essays, articles, and presentations ensures academic rigor while supporting learners in refining their ideas and self-expression. Through these assessment measures and activities, Intrapersonal Intelligence is effectively integrated into Legal English instruction, promoting learner autonomy, reflective thinking, and meaningful, personalized assessment.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined assessment practices in Legal English classrooms through the perspective of Multiple Intelligences Theory, highlighting the need for more inclusive and learner-centered approaches to evaluation. The findings suggest that integrating MI-based assessment methods, such as tests, essays, presentations, debates, portfolios, projects, and performance-based tasks, allows learners to demonstrate their legal language competence through diverse modalities. By addressing multiple intelligences, assessment practices become more authentic and better aligned with the complex demands of Legal English, including legal reasoning, critical thinking, and professional communication. Moreover, MI-oriented assessment enhances student engagement, motivation, and self-awareness, while reducing the limitations of traditional, test-centered evaluation. The study concludes that applying Multiple Intelligences Theory to assessment design contributes to a more comprehensive and equitable evaluation of learners' abilities. It is therefore recommended that Legal English instructors adopt varied assessment strategies grounded in MI theory to support diverse learners and improve the overall effectiveness of Legal English teaching and learning.

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